

A Tradition in History

Today's Amateur Radio clubs have some of the same activities and problems that the "old-time" clubs did.

By Rosalie White,* WA1STO

THE MILWAUKEE RADIO AMATEURS' CLUB, INC.

The World's Oldest Continuously Active Radio Amateur Club

AFFILIATED WITH
THE AMERICAN RADIO RELAY LEAGUE, INC.



CHARTERED AS
A NON-STOCK CORPORATION BY THE
STATE OF WISCONSIN

MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

Date: December 1919. The first transcontinental relay since the war takes place — between California, 6EA, and Chicago, 9ZN. Club members take on QRM control of spark-gap transmitter interference. The first 11 clubs in history affiliate with the ARRL.

Backing up a step, we see in August 1919 *QST* that Hiram Percy Maxim, himself, realized the benefits of the union of clubs and the ARRL. In mutual strength we all "gain in our efforts for legislative protection." The ARRL could "better represent the vast body of amateurs" by hearing from the clubs what they needed and wanted most. He expressed the potential of all radio clubs forming an association to handle relay work. Thus club affiliation began with an "interlocking of hands" for "the furtherance of Amateur Radio." Hiram knew what he spoke of and it is all true to-

day too, on the 60th anniversary of club affiliation.

First Affiliated Clubs

There are a few societies, such as the Hartford Radio Club (ancestor of the ARRL), that existed in the very earliest days of Amateur Radio, but the 11 listed in Table I were the very first to be ARRL affiliated. What has happened to these clubs during the past 60 years? In digging through the old club records we found no early files for the New England Amateur Wireless Association, Radio Traffic Association, Armour Villa Radio Association, Northern Indiana Radio Association, Ravenswood Radio Association or Council Bluffs YMCA Radio Club. Files of the first 10 years of affiliation are sketchy, and so to the next step — check out 1919 and 1920 *QST*s.

September 1919 *QST* mentions that New England AWA members were glad to have the Radio Inspector (FCC) back

from the service. October 1919 *QST* tells of the New England AWA second annual banquet with a count of 350 amateurs in attendance! The club eventually died out and little is known of later activities.

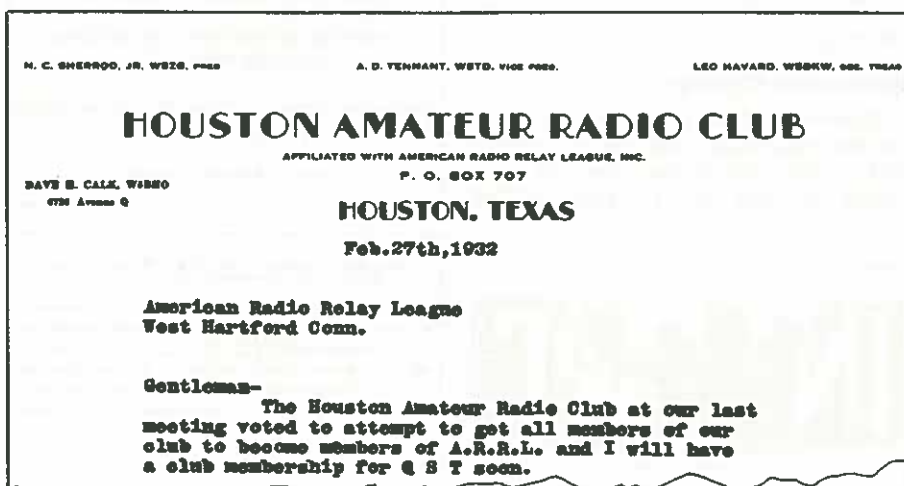
"The prevalence of inefficient operating was responsible for the organization of the Radio Traffic Association of Brooklyn, New York, in January 1917" (November 1919 *QST*). The club's purpose? The same reasons many clubs give today: fellowship, relay system and minimizing interference. In December 1919 the club's 20 members applied for affiliation. Further reports of 1920 tell of traffic-handling activities and semi-monthly club newsletters. No records or information exist that tell why the club folded.

No Records Until 1947

Austin Radio Club is not often mentioned in early *QST*s and Hq. records on the club are missing until 1947. Johnny Paul, WA5BGO, today's president, checked around and found several people who helped form the club back in 1916. Dave Harrel, W5CVQ (ex-5DD), and John Teykl, W5SD, were most helpful.

Ten local hams decided that they wanted to form a club. They met in 5DD's ham shack, a small building in his yard, and elected 5ZU, 5EM, 5GQ and 5DD as officers. Members wanted to listen to long wave cw stations and set about building amplifiers for doing so. A code proficiency class ran continuously. Streetcar interference was horrendous in those days. In 1916 when U.S. government officials chased Pancho Villa through Mexico, they shut down the hams for fear that hams would accidentally give out information on where the government agents were. There were also fears that the broad-signal, spark-gap equipment would interfere with government communications. In 1921, Dave left for Yale and thus

*Manager, ARRL Club and Training Dept.



Early Houston ARC correspondence discussed ARRL memberships.

RUDOLF A. TESCHAN, Secretary
ROY A. PELISHEK, Business Manager

LOY S. BAIRD, President
CLARENCE N. CRAPO, Vice-President

THOMAS C. WESTON, Treasurer
C. M. PRINCELOW, Sergeant-at-Arms

Weekly Meetings
8:00 P. M.
Thursday Evenings
Trustees' Room
Milwaukee Public Museum

The Milwaukee Amateurs' Radio Club

EXECUTIVE HEADQUARTERS
TESCHAN LABORATORIES

WEST 308

2319-2329 WELLS STREET
MILWAUKEE, WIS., U. S. A.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS
LOY S. BAIRD, Chairman
A. BERTRAM LORD, Vice-Chairman
ROY A. PELISHEK, Man. Director
RUDOLF A. TESCHAN
THOMAS C. WESTON

October 24th, 1919.

The American Radio Relay League, Inc.,
Hartford, Conn.

Gentlemen:

Milwaukee Amateurs' Radio Club letterhead stationery was a PR billboard, all its own in 1919. It told when and where the meetings were and who to contact. This letter was the initial request for affiliation.

can't comment on further club activities.

The club reapplied for affiliation in 1947 under the name Austin Amateur Radio Club. At that point 65 people belonged to the club, 53 as licensed amateurs. Emergency drills and Field Day were the highlighted activities. Club functions increased in the '50s to regular club bulletins, code classes and volunteer examiners, safety programs, mobile judging, PR activities, purchasing club station equipment and finding a station location, and Red Cross liaison. In 1979, the members regularly report club happenings through their club bulletin, *AARCOVER*. Club badges denote member call signs. Two club repeaters keep members in contact between meetings. DF hunts help to train members to find illegal operators who are using stolen equipment. A recent Novice class graduated two men and six women. Field Day was prefaced with emergency traffic for the Red Cross from the Wichita Falls

tornado disaster area, handled through the club station, W5KA.

More Clubs Die Out

News blurbs on the Northern Indiana Radio Association, Armour Villa Radio Association and the Council Bluffs YMCA Radio Club were not found in early *QST*s, other than the actual affiliation information. Off-shoots of the Council Bluffs club cropped up later, however, affiliating as Council Bluffs Radio Operators Club in 1933. This organization died out, reemerging in 1937 and becoming inactive again in 1962. Clubs, then and now, go through cycles. Great activity caused by a spurt in growth in the Amateur Radio Service, ups and downs with changes in the few workhorses of a club, new officers, or any of a number of other reasons may cause a rise or fall in club activity. Most clubs are active, die out for a while, reactivate and the sine wave goes on.

Ravenswood Disbanded

November 1919 *QST* states that all Ravenswood Radio Association members had commercial licenses and all were ARRL members when the group applied

for affiliation. The club instituted a junior membership for youngsters in March 1920. In 1921 the club disbanded — the reasons unexplained. An active club folded only a few years after it had sprung up. It still happens today.

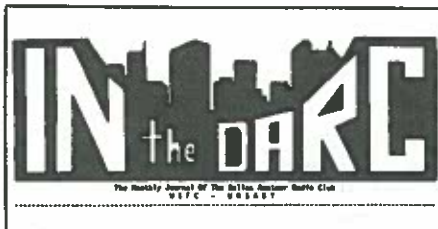
In the Center

Milwaukee ARC members labelled themselves "right in the center of things" back in the early days, and right they were. The club, founded by 9HO and others in January 1917, affiliated along with the other original clubs. In 1920 the club members were so well organized that the club stationery contained all the

Table 1

The first ARRL-affiliated clubs, as listed in January 1920 *QST* and the official Board of Directors' minutes.

New England Amateur Wireless Association — MA
Radio Traffic Association — NY
Austin Radio Club — TX
Council Bluffs YMCA RC — IA
Northern Indiana Radio Association — IN
Armour Villa Radio Association — NY
Ravenswood Radio Association — IL
Milwaukee Amateurs' Radio Club — WI
Dallas Radio Club — TX
Houston Radio Club — TX
New Mexico State College Radio Club — NM



Present-day club bulletin head for Dallas Amateur Radio Club.

MILWAUKEE RADIO AMATEUR'S CLUB

MEETS THIRD THURSDAY OF EACH MONTH
(EXCEPT JULY AND AUGUST) AT 7:30 PM
WAUMATOSA SAVINGS AND LOAN BUILDING
7500 WEST STATE STREET

INTERESTED PERSONS ALWAYS WELCOME TO ATTEND
PLENTY OF FREE PARKING

MRAC - FOUNDED IN 1917

THE MILWAUKEE AMATEURS' RADIO CLUB

EXECUTIVE OFFICE THE WEEKLY MEETINGS
PHONE GRAND 1716 EXCEPT THIRD MONDAY OF
801 ENTERPRISE ST. A. R. R. L. EACH MONTH
SECOND & SYCAMORE STS. 10:00 P. M. MONDAY EVENINGS
MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN TRUSTEES' ROOM
MILWAUKEE PUBLIC MUSEUM

1922

Milwaukee RAC present and past meeting announcement cards.

necessary information for good PR work. Between 1920 and 1922 club membership certificates, cards and information brochures were developed. It sounds like a club of today. Sixty years later their club members are just as enthusiastic. In 1920 they visited the Ravenswood Radio Association in Illinois to see how a successful club works. From early accounts of their club activity it is apparent that they did well on their own. The club met weekly and in 1923 half the members were licensed. The remainder provided good potential to keep the club going for several more years. Club activities included picnics, QSO parties, spark-gap interference control, conventions and PR in newspaper and other media resources. The club name was changed to Milwaukee Radio Amateurs' Club. In 1924 over 100 people became members and all belonged to ARRL. Outstanding!

Early 30s club functions included a garbled message contest, Field Day, the emergency group WERS, Sweepstakes, DX tests, classes and a safety contest. The club met continuously for 30 years, even during the war years. Today the Milwaukee RAC news sheet tells of regularly scheduled classes, year-round at all levels of licensing, RFI/TVI committee sleuthing, large exhibits at malls, social events, feature articles in the *Milwaukee Journal Sunday Magazine* "Insight" and interesting club guest speakers. The club now labels itself as the "World's Oldest Continuously Active Club." The two file folders of records that we have on hand certainly show this to be true. This is quite an accomplishment, deserving of our heartiest congratulations.

Dallas Still Active

Dallas Radio Club's second meeting was held in October 1919, whereupon members decided to apply for club affiliation. In 1921 this club held an exhibit at their state fair, an annual activity for clubs of today, too. Back then members pushed Mexican government officials for a traffic relay route into that country, quite a task to take on. Club secretary correspondence tells of statistics on presidential election returns sent via cw to area residents, as was the World Series, play-by-play and the Dempsey-Carpentier fight, blow-by-blow! One hundred members belonged to the club in 1923, and in 1925 a watermelon feed took place, a popular club social event today. The club developed off-shoots, a Dallas Amateur Wireless Association, affiliated in 1924 and Dallas Radio Research Society in 1928. The original club, renamed the Dallas Amateur Radio Club, reaffiliated in 1932 and has been quite active since then.

Recently, John Hill, WBSUEV, interviewed some of the old-timers of the present Dallas ARC. He found that club activity slowed between 1925 and 1928. In

Austin Amateur Radio Club
P. O. Box 13473
Austin, Texas 78711

Non-Profit Organization
U.S. Postage Paid
Austin, Texas
Permit No. 2842

ARRL
225 Main Street
Newington, CT 06111

AARCOVER AUGUST 1979

MEETING AUGUST 14, 1979

The club bulletin for Austin Amateur Radio Club, *AARCOVER*, loudly proclaims the date of the next meeting on the outside mailing cover.

1928, area hams asked Frank Corlett, Jr., club president in 1920, '21 and '23, to help stir up the group again. They even bought Frank a rig to show that they really wanted his assistance in reorganizing. Frank didn't like or use the rig because he liked his old spark-gap transmitter better! About half the members of the renovated 1928 club were members from the early days and about half were new hams. The older members were telegraph operators who, today, reminisce about how they weren't spoken to if they sent code poorly. Another old-time member and club secretary from 1920-21, Porter Bennet, owned a radio store for years, that all area hams went to.

Today the club is alive and well, with over 200 members. Their club bulletin often runs to 14 pages. This year's Field Day sported a four-transmitter station operation — phone, cw, YL and Novice. The club has T-shirts with their logo on the back. These are worn at the many public-service events for which the club provides communications. A club communications trailer is being made self-sustaining with battery power.

Houston Alive and Well

August 1919 *QST* reports that Houston, TX, area hams were making preparations to form a club that would affiliate with the League. In September, the first meeting of the Houston Radio Club took place. The area people had met since 1915, but not as Houston Radio Club, ready to affiliate. In October members applied for affiliation. The club was active for three years, dried up for a bit, and finally took off in a big way in 1925. Members met at the same location from 1919 to 1954. Through the 20s and 30s officers corresponded regularly with the League, sending in newspaper clippings on the club. These told of station photo contests, Sweepstakes activity, division-wide conventions, club bulletins, Field Day activity, DF hunts, classes and more. The club, as many other clubs now, reports the same types of things today. In 1955 members totalled 175; in 1977, 200.

Today the club, named the Houston Amateur Radio Club (HARC), continues

to be active. A statement on their annual report: "Ninety per cent of the club effort is directed toward training of amateur operators." *HARC News*, the club bulletin, tells of sponsoring regular classes, Field Day, TVI/RFI committee work, a PR campaign, members' upgrading and club station, W5PDA.

The Only School Club

New Mexico State College Club reported on their station as follows: "1/2 kilowatt set of the highest type," circa January 1920. Not much else can be found on this club, other than that the name changed at some point to State College Radio Club. In 1979 this club boasts 10 members, a PR campaign with radio demonstrations and the revised name of New Mexico State University ARC. College faculty advisors will testify to the fact that it is always tough to keep a school club consistently alive over the years, because of student turnover. This club was the only one of the original 11 that was a school or youth group. Today school and youth clubs represent 331 of the total 2200 active societies.

Binding Force

Clubs made up the binding force in the early days of Amateur Radio, the beginning of what could have been much less cohesive if not for these societies. As Hiram Percy Maxim put it in December 1919 *QST*: "In these hectic days of trying to get going with something really good, don't overlook the matter of the value of a Radio Club. We know whereof we speak, because we have seen the dark days of going it alone, playing the lone radio hand, and we have seen the brighter days when once a week we have rubbed elbows with others who are interested in the same problems that are perplexing us."

Reading further in that article, a lesson can be found for today, the 60th anniversary of the affiliation of these first 11 clubs. "The value of the Radio Club is more than the help it gives to the individual members by providing the opportunity to talk things over. It makes for strength of Amateur Radio generally." We wouldn't change a word, Hiram. 